As Good As Forever
By Pom

ELIZABETH II · BY THE GRACE OF GOD OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND QUEEN
HEAD OF THE COMMONWEALTH
DEFENDER OF THE FAITH
AND OF HER OTHER REALMS & TERRITORIES
HONI ◆ SOIT
MAL ◆ Y ◆ PENS
E
R
HONG KONG

The colony was to last forever, but forever always arrives

To Leslie Cheung, the first man to show me

that someone could be asian and queer.

We miss you Leslie.

The heads of the Gladstone family were twirling under crystal as their daughter shoved socks down her bra.

It was Friday, late Friday, Sage and her guy friend were able to blare Leslie Cheung throughout the entire room. Holding his every word. For Cheung was a god. That queer actor, musician, who had made it out. That man who would live forever.

"Do my boobs look real enough?"

Briar, sitting on a bean bag across the room, put down his book. What it was about he wasn't sure. "Do you want an honest answer?"

"Shut the fuck up Briar, you don't have to be an asshole."

"Sage, calm down, I'm joking" Despite Sage's earlier protests, he grabbed more pomade for his hair, dodging and weaving all the cardboard boxes that lingered through the room. Attempting a style before undoing any progress he had made, again and again. "Where are you guys moving to?" Sage didn't bother with a response. "Sage! Wh-"

"Christ, I heard you." She tossed a new bag of socks onto the ground "They're for the handover, we're heading home to Britain, where are you heading?"

"Home" Sage said, despite being born and raised in Hong Kong.

"I don't know, haven't asked." Briar slumped back onto his bean chair, lighting a fag he'd bummed off some kid at school. "I'd like to stay here though," he said by the window. "When's the handover?

"You're kidding."

"Wish I were."

“1997? Next year? It’s a wonder you’re able to put your pants on correctly.” Sage returned to the mirror, shoving and shifted the socks before punctuating with a- “fucking dumbass.”

“Worse things to be.” Briar flicked the ash from his cigarette into an ashtray. It had the queen’s young face on it. “Happy coronation!” In the ugliest lettering you could imagine.

Sage smiled, finally content with her C-cup, however shifty, it was enough.

“I suppose so,” she said, feeling around the drawers of her desk before tossing the modified biker shorts Briari brought. “Transexuals, yuckie,”

Briar blew a kiss and got binding. In that tiny room, high up in Victoria Peaks, two teenagers were preparing for a night out. They were assembling themselves in a way so reminiscent of the Peaks. They were to be a fairy tale. That “Western city in an eastern setting.” A fairytale, unbound my geographical reality and history.

They needed only remember the chimes of midnight.

—

“Where are those colonizers?”

“They’re running on white fag time, Kiki.”

Kiki reached deep into her bootlegged Gucci, pulling out the worst blunt yet rolled on the entire continent.

Alice could only snicker as she laid her head on her friend’s shoulder. “Kiki, you pothead.”

“If they’re gonna make me wait, they shouldn’t expect to meet me sober.”

Though she had already made her way through a Hooper's Hooch, she still scoffed in principle and passed her lighter. It was a beautiful silver piece of art, with flowers, fruits and vines engraved upon it. Remnants of an old emulation of European tastes. Of "modernity" of "civilization" that China ought to copy to survive the hands of America, Britain, Dutch, Japan…

And the signature of that fantasy, that resilience choking in the cradle: ROC

"Where did you even get this thing?" Alice asked.

"I told you girl, It's my 爷爷's from the war, Dad never shuts up about it, fascist piece of shit."

More daddy trauma, Alice was never dry of it, always talking about this or that fucked up family thing, despite the fact that not a soul had asked. Kiki had fucked up family too, and she never went running all over town about it. "You paged them right?"

"*Christ,* yes I paged them. 'Meet at Alice's spot.' I'm sure they're just calculating ways to get down here without bumping into too many 'scary streets' or whatever."

"That was fucking hilarious."

"I know," Kiki said with a chuckle. "Sage was terrified to leave her little bubble. You could hear it in her voice."

Kiki leaned her head on Alice. Snickering with a laugh at her half hidden smile. "They really live in a different world, don't they?"

Alice looked down, watching Kiki begin to close her eyes. Was that hooch on her breath?

“They do, but that’s why I have you, cuz you get it.” Alice began to trace Kiki’s lips with her fingers, such pretty, chapped things. “Such a hard worker, so smart, so brave” Kiki began to get the giggles. “Soooo pretty…”

“My makeup is sooooo fucked thoughhhhh.”

“Yeah, that’s really fucking hot.”

Kiki rose from Alice’s arms, still allowing them to tangle across her back as she stared into her “close friend’s” eyes. Their lips touching, practically. “Yeah, you should do something about that…” She held Alice by her chin, allowing her fingers to move closer and closer to her mouth. “Such a pretty, pretty girl like you…”

Alice couldn’t hold it any longer.

She grabbed Kiki, shoving her head deep into her face as they wrote fantasies with their tongue. Climbing on each other, groping each other, loving, no, melting, until there was no telling where one began and the other ended.

“You’re so fucking beautiful.” Who said it? Didn’t matter. No such details did.

“We’re here!”A voice screamed through the door.

“JESUS CHRIST.”

“Didn’t they teach you to knock? 屌樣 (Dick) .”

Already sweating under the Hong Kong heat, the colonizers stood under the doorway, panting and laughing. Their fine, borrowed evening wear already drenched with sweat.

“Don’t just stand there, come in, come in.”Alice gestured as Kiki repositioned her head to lie on Alice’s lap, a compromise between their near brush with

voyeurism and refusing to let two 鬼佬 (Gweilo) ruin her evening . “Who’s the girl, she’s beautiful.”

Sage blushed.

“This,” Briar took her hand, perfectly manicured hand. “Is our very own, Miss Gladstone.”

Alice sat up (much to Kiki's dismay) running to give the “new girl” a hug. “Sage, hun, you look gorgeous. You…look so fucking incredible.” Sage smiled her widest smile. So perfect, chiseled and white. Damn near passing on day one, Alice thought.

“For what it's worth, Mr. Campbell,” Alice shifted, as fast as possible. “I think you look dashing, this evening. Something outta The Great Gatsby.”

Briar looked down at Alice, her short hair waved into an obnoxious 20’s flapper style, And a fuzzy sweater protecting the space under a short skirt that grazed her knees, which she shaved with a trusty and rusty razor. “And Faye Wong wants her wardrobe back.”

“I want to look hot, sue me.”

Briar grabbed her hand, kissing the edge of her knuckle, as was his way. “You already are.”

“What are you gonna do when you get hot, we’re not going to a fancy dinner you know.”

“I could ask you the same question.”

“Unlike Kiki, I have a bra on.” Which Briair really could’ve gone his night without knowing.

“What about you, got a little secret under that suit? Or are you just prepared to sweat the whoooole night?” Alice smiled at the words leaving her lips. “Hehe, hole..”

“How long have you been smoking?”

“A while,” she giggled.

“Ok fags, come on.” Kiki clapped her hands. I came here to dance. Let’s go, let's go.” She ran up to Alice, grabbing her arm and dragging her to the door. “Let’s go, let’s go! Where are we going? I know you got a spot.”

She did, and she was sure it was the best in town.

—

Years ago, the height of Hong Kong nightlife looked like a bunch of men cosplaying the Monopoly Man, ranting about that one oriental blocking the Suez or their cotton production in India over a nice cup of tea harvested by a child. It smelled of cigars and nostalgic hotel food. Good times, for those invited at least.

Then, in the streets of hawkers yelling over women trying to make the best marriage arrangements, where the smells of the segregated city and of street vendors distilling years of cuisine for the price of pocket change, arrived a gay man Said gay man thought it a good idea to make a habit of throwing parties in some basement. A place where everyone, yes everyone, could mingle, get drunk and throw up in each other's lap. Decades passed, the colonizers prepared to abandon ship but discos and neon lights were promised not to go anywhere. Hong Kong, after all, was built on promises.

They called it 蘭桂坊 (Lan Kwai Fong).

And it was hot. And it was loud. And in the streets swam our four friends, all waving through the ocean of strangers and music waging war in the wide road. Jpop, Cantopop and all the different flavors of Western music descended from the speakers. Where all kinds of couples held hands, made out, and everything under the lights.Everyone and everything sculpted out of divine marble.

“Kiki, stop staring.”

Kiki couldn’t hear For the people jumping through these streets, in miniskirts, and leather clothes and beautiful hair made of silk were something she could never be. They were alive and partying and dreaming, in an era , in a city she never got to taste till now.

It was so un-fucking-fair.

What gave them the right?

Obviously, she wasn’t pro-British, she wasn’t stupid. But she couldn’t stop thinking of mom, out at sea. Dad stabbed by a bunch of savages fed on corn and oil, leaving her mom to survive off sheer will. And that feeling, not of joy or anything resembling that. But a cessation of horror, as she saw British Hong Kong.

“You don’t know what it's like to starve, because you were born after. The things we did-” her sister never shut up about it. Never stopped fucking crying about it, as if she could remember. Yes, her sister was a refugee, and Kiki wasn’t. Her sister made sure she never forgot it.

What would she think now? Seeing her out in 蘭桂坊, condoms and bubble gum in her pockets. At an age where her sister, Nhung, was eating tree bark and praying to Quan Âm for another day.

“It’s all so unfair.”

“What?” Kiki stopped and grabbed Alice’s hand, as if to hold her back from something.

“Nothing.”

“Didn’t sound like nothing, talk to me.”

Kiki turned, looking up at Alice only to show her face melting into a smile. “It’s nothing, really.” She placed her head on Alice’s shoulder, hands gripping her companion all too tight. “I love you.”

Kiki was fucking impossible.

“Where are we going?” Sage called from the front.

“Don’t act like you don’t see it. There.”

“Where?”

Alice let go, ran up to the whites and gestured towards the palace of their evening. It was a mansion blaring bass, men and women spilling from each orifice, all dressed in little more than glitter and high boots.

“We’re going in there?”

Alice tossed some gum in her mouth. “You know, if its too much-”

“No, no, it looks fun.

“Sage,” Briar said at a near whisper. “If you’d rather-”

“I’d rather go inside.”

Because she wasn’t only Sage Gladstone. Because she could be north of Hollywood Road. She could walk down streets others beat into her scull that she had to avoid. She could talk to all sorts of yellow strangers. Because she was a Hong Konger. Goddamnit. She was a Hong Konger.

Alice dove through the the people oozing out the door, hiding all the smugness on her face within the mass of flesh. The man by the door was big, bored and bald. Surely he had a name, a rich inner life, all that jazz, but he hid that too well at work. No, here, he was a statue, moving only the knock out the undesirable riff raff. The poor who run with a tab.

The trannie running by his legs looked the type.

Bangs nearly covering her eyes, nails all chipped and black, not in a stylish way either.

But he was bored.

He remained quiet and stepped aside.

Right as the party had entered the building, Alice had dragged Kiki deep into the flesh jumping, dancing and rubbing into each other. They were gone before Briar and Sage could even realize or protest.

It wasn’t personal.

This world was like a dash of light. Of men with bleached blonde and buzzed hair and lips a cold, bright blue. Of women with boots which reached their knees, or platforms that added a foot. And of everyone else, spinning until sweat washed the

glitter out of their hair. This, more than anything blood could dictate or proclaim, was Alice's family.

It was unhealthy, yes, but it *was.* Being is a hard thing to do.

But this, to Sage, was a brave new world. An unexplored paradise once mapped only in her dreams. She saw lesbians swapping spit, men rubbing against each other. Amidst the crowds and flesh, you could spot a few angels, a woman with a deeper voice, a man with breasts, some beautiful being caked in eyeliner and a muscle tee. If heaven didn't look like this, Christianity, she thought, was a scam.

It was enough to make Sage cry

"Is it too much?" Briar asked, stepping aside so she could breathe.

"What? No, no, no-" She wiped her tears before giving up. Watching them slowly fall and splatter onto the floor. "It's like a dream..."

She looked around. At all the happiness, and the pleasure, and people existing. Merely being there and standing and that was enough. And it was beautiful. Something she couldn't ever imagine. Like she had gone her whole life without seeing light, and had just now graced the sun.

"You're not alone, Sage." Briar grabbed her hand. "And here is the proof."

"You're so fucking cheesy Briar."

"You love me."

"I do."

Before she could say another word, she grabbed his hand, and pulled him with her into the heart of the party . Where they melted, and danced, and loved for the night. Before the spell could end, before the end of the PM.

—

“After this,” Alice began, Kiki’s hands draped around her waist. “You really have to think about moving.”

“No I don’t.”

“Kiki-”

“I’m sorry I don’t have family in California, Alice. Besides, I’m plenty happy here.”

Alice dug her head into Kiki’s shoulder. So many ideas in that little head, but nowhere for them to go. Kiki wasn’t a writer like Alice, she was an illustrator. And she could bring so many worlds and creatures to life, but struggled to keep them.

“I’m not saying you have to know exactly what you wanna do or where you wanna go, just that you could think about it. If you want to stay, then stay. But it’ll be a different place. That’s all, hun.”

And Alice was a writer. Which of course means she had ideas, sometimes they were even good. But she had the faults of a writer.

“I’m not a child who scraped my knee. Don’t call me hun.”

“I’m just-”

“Christ, Alice. Can you let me enjoy this? Please. For fuck- get your head off my shoulder.” She dropped her hands from Alice’s waist, quickly moving them to her

own. They didn't have to feel empty that way. "I'm an adult. I can't go to America, I'm not going to China, I can't go to Britain. Vietnam is-"

"You can go to Japan, right?"

"I don't know Japanese."

"You could learn, right?"

She wouldn't and she knew it. She would stay in Hong Kong, because her sister needed her. Because Nhung was leaving for America. Because her mom didn't have anyone to look after her. Because she needed her, and her sister made sure of it. "We're equal after this."

There was too much history, she figured, to learn Japanese. Too much left to do.

"Yeah, I could learn."

Alice smiled, grabbing Kiki's hands. "You could." A faint, sour smile.

And for a moment, Alice imagined it. Kiki rushing through the streets of Tokyo, maybe Shinjuku or Harajuku with all the fashions of those streets donning her. And one day Alice would visit, on a brisk autumn day, and she'd show her around her favorite cafes and favorite spots. And Kiki will smile at passerbys she knew, and she'd take her to a restaurant, and they'd argue over the privilege of paying.

But that could never be.

Not for them.

But it was pretty idea, no? A beautiful fantasy.

"Are you excited for America?" Kiki asked, her hands wrapped around Alice again.

“Yeah,” She grabbed her lover's hands, holding them, against the tide of time. “I think it’ll be fun.”

She was set to leave next month. But Kiki didn’t know that yet. She wouldn’t know until she was already gone.

—

“ I need to go.”

The room was way too loud, not only a noise kind of loud, a loudness of flesh, of bodies, eyes. So many eyes were on Sage, eyes with interpretations, expectations.

Allistic readers, imagine drowning in the sound of a room. All that noise, light, curiosity filling and filling till your legs and your torso existed in different plains. And imagine that only you, and a select amount of people, saw this, and everyone else merely watched. Not with cruelty, but rubbernecking curiosity.

“Should I get Alice?”

Sage close her eyes, tightening and contracting her body against all the thorns and spikes of the sound.

It wasn’t better, or safer, but it was something she could do.

That’s all she needed.

“I don’t know.”

Sage had lived her whole life surrounded by “the fine things of life” as her father liked to say. With private film screenings, and a housemaid to do the chores, and another person to buy her clothes. All the finest, well made, fit to perfection. It was like a cage made of marble

And here, she had finally left it.

And still, she could only run back. What a pathetic thing to do, a pathetic person to be, she thought.

Briar grabbed her hand, cutting through the ocean of flesh and sweat. Whether people wanted to part or not was no concern of his, he made them part. Breaking through the door in what was surely a record time, where the lights hummed instead of screamed, where the yelling was distanced, the air crisp and abundant.

He stopped a beat, hands off Sage, watching as she washed herself in the air of the open street. They sat there only a moment, Briar watching the breathing revert to a safe rhythm.

“Are you hungry?”

“Very,” Sage said.

“I know a perfect place.” He had only 10 bucks in his pocket, but that could get you a lot, if you knew the streets well.

They arrived, and Briar granted her permission to open her eyes.

And for the first time since the changing room, he’d heard what he’d been trying to get out of her all night. A laugh.

Briar had taken her to the golden arches, because of course he fucking did.

“你想要咩” The woman asked, fatigue leaping through every syllable. Despite her bosses best wishes she even had a little cup of coffee for herself . The golden symbols of American capitalism reflected on the puddle near her feet

“我想要一份麥樂雞九件” Briar had said with a grin. As if a little bit of Cantonese was impressive in Hong Kong. “餐飲要可樂吖” The girl across the counter chuckled a bit at that, writing the item down with a snicker.

“Your cantonese is good, but you should practice more with fluent speakers ” She revealed her braces scattered across her teeth, the only thing keeping her from the gum she hid under her drawer. “She your girlfriend?” She said, gesturing to Sage.

“Yes.”

“She is gorgeous.”

Sage could only stare at her shoes, assured her face would betray her in one way or another. Of course, the first place she’d ever get correctly gendered would be a fast food joint. Where else?

Sage, Kiki and Alice were all transwomen, but make no mistake, that did not mean they were the same. If Sage had said any of those thoughts out loud, Alice would no doubt punch her square in the gut (and she’d deserve it). They were not “real women”, nor did they have any intention of fitting those Victorian, white, upper class standards that only Briar and Sage could afford due to their winning the genetic lottery. Kiki and Alice were their own kinds of women, women without tits, with long, messy hair and “boyish” looks. That was real to them. Woman enough to not pull their hair out while looking in the mirror. Maybe, they wanted more, but couldn’t afford it. Maybe, they were just happy the way they were. Maybe it was another act of gender radicalism, you’d have to ask them, which Sage didn’t bother doing.

“Thank you, I’d like to order as well.”

“My English is not perfect, but I love to help.”

“Better than his Cantonese I bet.”

Again, the woman, who Briar had realized was wearing a nametag with the name “Tiffany” pulled out the bilingual menu. Her boss, a white man with a ticket to New Zealand for next month, once said that if he ever saw her use it for orders he’d fire her himself. “We’re gonna have white customers,” he had said. “They don’t wanna wait for your studying.”

A strange theory he had yet to prove. Besides, he was never “on the front lines” anyways. He was too busy pretending to staple shit together.

“A big mac and a coffee please.”

Tiffany wrote it all down with a smile. “We have that out! Please find a seat.”

“We left our mission for Hong Kong nightlife for McDonalds?”

“Sorry, we’ll go to KFC next time.”

Sage leaned against the cheap booth padding, as the street’s lights poured through the window of the restaurant. Empty, save for the men across the dining room, rating the women who passed them by. Slurring words Sage didn’t know were possible to slur. It was gross, but honest

Tiffany walked over, balancing the tray in one hand like a 50’s diner girl. “Here is your order. Everything ok?”

Beholden to them was a fine American feast of glistening golden nuggets, watered down syrup, cheap cow flesh and coffee.

“All good!” Sage said, her hands wrapped entirely around her burger

“Amazing! Enjoy your meal!”

“Fwum, I nweeded wiz.” Sage uttered between the cow flesh and secret sauce. Taking in the food, the dirty tables and uncles sitting at the window. There was no party here, no loud noises, there was only the restaurant, the same place you could find just about anywhere. Nothing, besides the labor which held it together, different from another across the street.

Then rung the bell by the door.

“How’d you end up here?”

—

In America, gold was meant to flow from the rivers. You couldn’t walk a street without hearing someone else’s story, how your cousin took the plunge and came back the richest in the family line. He would have a castle, just like that (when asked if there were castles in America, he would reply “of course”).

Of course it was just putting on airs, of course he was starving, sweating, for the chinese were said to be “cheap”.

How strange then, that China was so rich. Why else, upon the battering, bruising and blood from without and within, would the whites and Japanese come to them, blood dripping down their lips.

Nearly a hundred years before tonight's festival, The Right Honourable Colonel Claude Maxwell MacDonald signed a treaty for his queen. To expand the land they’d acquired from two wars fought with opium as well as gunpowder.

The lease on this land , already conquered , claimed and camped, was expanded to 99 years. The paper said one thing, the man with the guns said it was “As good as forever.”

But forever has a way of arriving.

—

Alice and Kiki first made out while supposedly watching a Jackie Chan flick Then they continued on the family couch. It was here, with Alice’s cheap lipstick covering Kiki’s face, and passionate gasps for breath between eternity, that Alice made a promise. “我喜欢你 .”

“hmm?”

“Nothing, it means nothing.”

“Yêu cưng quá nèè”

“Oh, fuck you too!”

Hidden from their shared language were the promises they couldn’t keep. But Alice, as she stared into her future girlfriend's eyes, saw such a future, such a beauty, that she couldn’t stop herself .

“I love you.”

The person who would become Kiki held herself above Alice, with red and spit all over her lips. Alice could see her brown eyes, spiraling and grasping for the words. Her heart was beating so fast she could nearly help it.

“You don’t mean that.”

“I do.”

“xạo loz”

And together, they watched the stars disappear. Their forever lasted a whole three years. Watching homes crumble, countries end, and the ink on treaties dry under the weight of time.

That was forever ago.

Now, under a thousand lights, in between the flesh of a thousand gay, lesbian and trans bodies sweating. As bare stomachs, six packs and chests slipped into sight, our two lovers stood apart. In their youth, they had sworn such a place was paradise, but that was so long ago. And those eyes Alice had stared into s, no longer stared back.

“You hungry?”

“No.”

“Hun-”

“I said don’t call me hun.”

“If you’re gonna keep being a bitch I’m just gonna leave.”

Without even looking at her, Kiki uttered the harshest words Alice, a queer trans woman in 90’s Hong Kong, had ever heard. The worst of all, they were not said, not screamed, but spoken, above a whisper.

“Then go.”

—

“How’d you end up here?” Briar called from the booth. Alice only continued walking towards the counter. Her boots wet, her face downward. “即磨咖啡” she said

at the front before sitting down near Sage, chunks of flesh still falling from her mouth

“Alice-”

“Leave me alone Briar. I just want a coffee.”

“Is everything-”

“Yes Briar, I’m alone at a McDonalds at-” she checked her watch. “Damn near midnight, ordering a black coffee because everything is honky fucking dorey. Fucking idiot”

Briar grabbed a sip of the coke, forgetting whether it was his or Sages.

Alice looked down. Meaning to wipe the makeup off, but smearing glitter and eyeliner were over her arm. An artifact of the night that was, well, whatever it was supposed to be.

The restaurant was so quiet.

And the lights so loud.

There was a whole world out there. A city of lovers, and cheaters sneaking beyond the city lights. Despite the cries of the crowds, white foreigners scramming around, photographing everything under the Queen’s domain before it falls, this city would last. Surely, it would last.

Right?

“咖啡! 咖啡!”

“我黎緊喇!”

Alice grabbed her coffee, before shortly returning to the booth.

Where else was she to go?

“You gonna stop staring at me? Or are we going to talk? Like adults? You know, those wiggly things that pay for your makeup?”

“You’re an asshole Alice”

“Shut the fuck up Briar.” Her eyes caught the woman starring from behind the counter. “It’s funny, I’ve never see n you work a day in your fucking life.. You don’t know what an asshole even is. Where the fuck are you even going after this city explodes because of people like you?”

As if she hadn’t already known. As if everyone in the group hadn’t known where the whites were going.

“Japan.”

“Oh really? And where in Japan?”

“Tokyo.”

「東京！」She chuckled. “You elongate the o’s dumbass. Tōkyō, like that. You can’t even say it right. Let me guess, dad’s ‘Oriental Publishing’ is moving? And Sage, what about you? “

“Alice, stop being such an asshole? Briar and I are trying-”

“And you think I don’t wanna have a good night? I’m some sorta bat that goes to my cave, somewhere far away, and that I’ll just sit there waiting? I wanted us to have a nice night before I left for Cali, and you guys split up. Kiki acts like a dumbass and you call me the asshole? What the fuck Sage, I’m sorry I don’t pass like you. I’m sorry I don’t have the money you do. You think I like having a month before I leave

everyone? That I'm not terrified of what will happen in America? That fucking shithole of a country"

"Alice…" Sage reached out her hand. "Why didn't you tell anybody you were leaving?"

"I don't know Sage, maybe I wanted one last night? As friends?"

"Alice, hun." Sage placed her hand on her shoulder. Her eyes about to burst. "We're still gonna be friends. No matter where you go."

—

"A dedication to all the refugees worldwide."

The room was dark in the club, and the music was so very loud. Kiki began to drown between the bodies. Her head beginning to split between the sweat running down her spine and the aching in her feet. This place further and further devolved into the most carnal competition for space. People rummaging, fighting, kissing, reaching to touch more flesh. To touch anything, so long as it made the night lasted a moment longer.

"In this great future -" The speakers hummed.

Finally, Kiki managed to make her way to the door. Out of this jungle and into those streets that would hold her, at least for tonight.

Kiki wasn't going to Japan. She would stay in this town till there was nothing of her left.

Perhaps a different story, Kiki's own, would cut to her future that surely wasn't as bad. It would show her triumphs, show her resting her feet into the dirt. And

watching, as all the seeds she planted took root, her hands caressing their sweet produce.

But before that is interim.

Before that is her first “real” job. A baton meeting her skull.. Screaming matches and escapes into apartments of people who yielded love of her. The sight of her hero’s corpse, Leslie Cheung, splattered on the street.

Footnotes in the diaries she would keep, leading to the next milestone. A never ending garden for the decades.

It was here that she first caught a glimpse of it.

She dug into her bag, rolling one last joint and disappearing into the night. In two hours or so, Sage will page her apologizing.

And Kiki will not respond.

—

“Bullshit.” Sage grabbed her cup, sipping the soaring hot brew, allowing it to burn her throat. It was, of course, unwise to drink coffee so late. But that burn, that sting. It made her feel alive.

A rare feeling for a trans-teen.

“Alice, you’re a writer.”

Sage, being a rich white person, had a lot of opinions. She had a lot of opinions, and read a lot of books.

Perhaps she was smart, maybe smarter than Alice. But what, Alice always wondered, would Sage know if she were in the same neighborhood as she? Had to work the same roads, take the same buses?

“Sadly, yes.”

Alice snickered.

“Then you should know that “endings” are a thing made up for stories. That's not how real life works. We will always carry each other, whether we want to or not, and we will always remember this summer, this night, even if faintly. Even if faintly, that still means something.``

“The end is never the end. The story continues, the money continues. Then finally, when all is said and the curtains draw, there is a point, all else is epilogue.”

—

It is June 30th, late into the night. That cusp of time where the night turns to morning in all ways “technical.” There is no sun at midnight, no birds to sing. Just humans drawing a line in the sand.

My grandfather is watching. He is watching as his home, the place of his ancestors, is said to change forever, in all ways “technical.” He gazes at his television, seeing a land he once knew in childhood. His childhood, before he poisoned his mind with the bills, Chinese nationalism and American imperialism.

Prince Charles of Wales stands in the rain. Four or five hours ago, he said goodbye to this city, to this empire he was to inherit. Or at least, a form of it.

The trumpets blare.

A journalist coughs.

My grandfather is watching. Watching as the land he left dissipates before his eyes. And the flag his family swore against, in the name of God, of the ancestors is raised. In this moment, that fabric is all that has changed. But it's a line in the sand, as there ought to be.

—

“Then what, dear Sage, is the point?”

“That there is no such thing as ‘The End.’”

—

It's summer in Mong Kok.

Its summer, and a student is outside. His girlfriend tightens his goggles, and wraps him in plastic. There are middle schoolers, high schoolers and college students. There are journalists, politicians and police officers. There are barricades and chants high enough to raise the sky.

She kisses his forehead and passes a yellow umbrella. “你好靚仔。” She whispers, a tear falling from her eye.

He kisses her back.

There is a roaring in the distance. A yellow banner unfolds, proclaiming with big black letters to disperse. That the protest is now illegal. A student lectures to an officer. A journalist prepares a mask.

“我愛你。” One last kiss, he sinks to the crowd.

And there are cries. And a reverend is pleading. And the clock's about to strike. The call for tear gas falls into the crowd. And suddenly the umbrella makes sense. And suddenly, this is no longer a fantasy. Not kids playing democracy, no.

It is summer.

The students are crying.

They are crying because of the tear gas.

Because they can't see where to run. Because there is so much pain. Because the pigs are right behind them and there's nowhere else to go.

Because the sun is yet to rise.

—

"And how would a story with that point end?"

"It just would. Out of the blue."

—

Operation Dawn was a success as the police van rolled back in flames. Finally, everything would be alright. They had guarded their school, their home which days and sweat had turned into an impenetrable fortress

Or so they thought

Across the courtyards, the sewers, cafeteria and every inch of Hong Kong Polytechnic, students created ladders, jumped onto sofas, and sped away on motorcycles as fast as they could.

The police beat the ones who didn't.

"WHERE ARE WE GOING!?"

Students would yell, grabbing bombs and paint. Running past the walls where the cries of “free HK!” and “光復香港，時代革命!” became but a background.

“WHY THE FUCK ARE YOU GRABBING THOSE.”

“SO WE CAN BLOCK THE ENTRANCE.”

And where students once run for class, there’d be shards of broken glass. As the bomb exploded into a dozen flames. A pit of fire roaring in the stairs. The chairs and paint and art all burning, the embers rising towards heaven. It would buy a minute, maybe two, but that could save a life.

Elections were a week away.

They weren’t gonna wait till morning.

—

“That’s the dumbest shit I’ve ever heard.”

—

Finally, you’re a college student. You swear to leave the past where it belongs. You’re finishing your first novel, applying for a job, revising a story for a workshop. And you’ve never felt more alive, even if it takes three coffees a day.

You’re me.

A fate worse than death,, but humor me.

It's a beautiful day on campus. The flowers are in bloom, birds hopping from tree to tree. And here, in the warm early days of the Indiana fall, you can still feel the sun oh so peacefully graze your skin that, years later, people would describe as having a “light honey glow.”

You wander into the media school. A giant complex of screens and tvs all combining to form a giant window into the world. Where one can gaze upon sports, news and re-runs of Two Broke Girls, at once.

You've known and loved this place for so long.

You remember watching the protests on these screens one summer during your high school years.

But you're here now. And you're sitting on these shitty little seats that are too small, and your back hurts and all the screens are tuned to BBC, because it's morning and the queen is dead. And a part of you said good riddance. And a part of you laughed, and cheered. Because you're a decolonial hottie. And you're staring at that giant screen enveloping you, and you put your homework aside because surely, this is more important.

There's a line outside the British Consulate.

There are tears, flags and little drawings of Paddington holding Elizabeth's hand as they walk into the distance. It is said that people are sweating in the heat, but they don't care. They have sunglasses and hats to block the sun.

There haven't been protests since high school, but that now feels so long ago.

Remember, when it was all anyone could talk about? Remember, all the tweets, texts, art and Time's front pages?

And for a moment, for just a moment, people looked at you, and they listened to you. You could swear you were at the top of the world because you knew who Joshua Wong and Nathan Law were, and you showed videos of that burning van to

faces of disbelief. And you were dreaming of the morning to come, and in your fantasies, you could hear the songs of the birds.

All of that was so long ago.

Joshua Wong is in jail. Nathan Law is in exile.

And it's morning. And you're still tired from the night before. From the dreariness of real life.

And the queen is dead.

And the camera cuts to King Charles of Britain.

And you trying not to, but you can't help it.

You're crying.

—

"Tough shit. That's life. Nothing makes sense, shit ends. Shit begins, we're left to pick up the mess."

A Story about trans teens, colonization, refugees and some weird meta ending bullshit (that's actually pretty good I swear)

READ IT! BEFORE FASCISTS BAN IT

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